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2 PAUL's Defence before FELIX,

CONSIDERED AND APPLIED IN

*May 22 1799*

*JJ.*

*from the author*

A S E R M O N,

Preached APRIL 27th, 1791,

AT THE OPENING OF

THE NEW CHAPEL,

I N

GEORGE-STREET, PLYMOUTH-DOCK.

By JOSHUA TOULMIN, A. M. *K*

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To the GENTLEMEN,

Who formed the design of opening a chapel,  
for divine worship, on *Unitarian* principles,  
At PLYMOUTH DOCK;

Whose generosity and zeal have carried it into  
execution;

At whose desire the following discourse was  
preached;

And at whose earnest and unanimous request  
it is now published :

And to all who have contributed to the accom-  
plishment of that pious undertaking ;

THIS SERMON

Is respectfully inscribed,

By their obedient servant,

TAUNTON,  
May 12, 1791.

THE AUTHOR.

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## Paul's Defence before Felix.

ACTS xxiv. 14, 15, 16.

*But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets. And have hope towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. And herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man.*

THE words, that I have read, are part of a defence, which Paul made for himself before Felix, the Roman governor of Judea, against the charge of Tertullus, the orator; whom the Jews employed to accuse this apostle. "By the Roman law both parties were to be heard, before sentence was past\*." When therefore this advocate had finished his harangue, and the priest and elders had attested his allegations; the governor beckoned with

\* Dr. Benson.

his hand for Paul to speak. On which he entered into a full vindication of himself against three crimes laid to his charge. Tertullus had accused him of *sedition, heresy, and the profanation of the temple*. As to the *first*, he suggests that he had not been long enough at Jerusalem to form a party and attempt an insurrection, and challenges them in fact to produce any evidence of such practices, v. 11—13. As to the *profanation of the temple*; he tells them, that he had entered it with some peculiar rites of religious purification, and had behaved himself there in a most peaceable and regular manner, so that his innocence had been evident, even before the sanhedrim, where the authors of the tumult did not dare to appear against him, v. 17—21\*. Our text is a reply to the second charge: and it exhibits a candid ingenuous profession of Paul's religion. "He confesses himself to be a christian;" but maintains, that in this he professed the same faith, which the patriarchs and the prophets had embraced; nay, he urges that his sentiments and views agreed with those of his enemies, for he had the hope towards God of a resurrection which they had; and that, so far from being guilty of the crimes of which they accused him, this expectation and faith

\* Cradock's Apostolical History, p. 288, 289. Doddridge's Family Expositor, in loc.

engaged

engaged him to preserve "a conscience void of  
"offence toward God and toward man."

Our design is briefly to open the defence of  
himself, which the apostle here sets up—to make  
some remarks on it—and then to apply it to the  
present occasion.

The first thing which Paul alledges in his own  
favour, against the charge of his enemies, is that he  
worshipped the same God as *his*, consequently as  
*their*, pious ancestors adored. "This I confess  
"unto thee, that after the way which they call  
"*heresy*, so worship I the God of my fathers."  
The apostle useth the like language in other places.  
In writing to Timothy, he "thanks God" as the  
being whom he had "served from his forefathers  
"with a pure conscience." And he may be consid-  
ered as having borrowed his sentiments and  
language not only from the truth of the case, but  
from Ananias, who had revealed to him the purposes  
of divine providence with respect to his conversion,  
and told him, "the God of our fathers hath chosen  
"thee, that thou shouldst know his will."

Under his present circumstances, this view of his  
religious profession was both a pertinent answer to  
the charge of Tertullus, and a just plea before the  
*Roman* governor. The *Roman* law prohibited the  
public and private worship of any God not allowed  
by public authority. Paul, as it were, pleads that

this law could not affect him. He had not introduced any new God : but worshipped only the God, whom the Jews did, and whose worship was permitted, nay sanctioned, by particular edicts and decrees, through the empire, in which Felix was a governor\*. And as a regard to paternal deities was held honourable among the Greeks and Romans†, the plea of the apostle was an address to the common sentiments of mankind, and an appeal to the opinion of the most learned nations.

It was also a particular reply to the charge brought against him, v. 5. " as a pestilent fellow, " a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the " Nazarenes ;" or of the new heresy. With this invidious title was his religion branded. But how unjustly, how improperly, when it was the same way, which his fathers and theirs had followed ? Was this moving sedition to adhere, with them, to the same object of devout adoration ? Or could any reflection or obloquy rest upon his worship, which would not as justly fall upon them who accused him ? If they meant, by the charge of heresy, to reproach him, the infamy was undeserved. If they meant by it to draw on him the indignation

\* Lardner's Works, last edit. vol. I. p. 190.

† Doddridge's Family Expositor, in loc. note (d).



of the Roman governor, it was groundless; for he, equally with themselves, was under the protection of the Roman laws.

But not only with respect to the object of worship, but with regard to his principles of faith and hope, the charge of heresy was ungrounded: for the apostle adds,

That his worship was governed by the same rule as theirs: he, as well as they, believing "all things which are written in the law and the prophets." He avers his sacred regard to the law of Moses, as derived from God, and to the prophets, who succeeded that lawgiver, in the different ages of the Jewish church, and in the name of God called them to repentance, or under his inspiration predicted their future fates, and raised the expectation of the Messiah. Here the apostle adapted his defence to the avowed sentiments of his accusers, and placed it on a ground, which they could not but respect and reverence. His faith was more consistent and more perfect than that of many of his enemies: some of whom, as the Sadducees, acknowledged only the books of Moses: and others of whom, as the Pharisees, had added, to his law, the doctrines of men; and had corrupted, if not enervated, the divine code by human traditions. Paul, with the like reverence of  
faith,

faith, embraced the prophets and the law : and he built his faith on the authority of the scriptures only, not on the uncertainty of traditions.

This part of his vindication tended not only to prove, in general, that he was unjustly branded with infamy, and had an equal right with his accusers to the protection of the magistrate : but it went, particularly, to justify his character as a preacher of Christ; for this arose out of his faith in the law and the prophets, who had testified of the Messiah. While he preached Christ, he was supported by what they had declared concerning him; and instead of subverting, established the authority of their word, and the truth of their predictions. His conduct rested on a divine foundation, and it was animated by a glorious hope. In his principles and his object he agreed with those, who impeached him as a “pestilent man and an heretic.”

He proceeds, “and have hope towards God” “which they themselves also allow, that there shall, “be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just “and unjust.” This was more than all his countrymen, who were inimical to him, did allow : for the Sadducees said that there would be no resurrection. The Pharisees, who were the leading and popular party, held this doctrine, but not to that extent, to which Paul carried his views; for it

was

was the opinion of most of them that the resurrection would be limited to the righteous\*; but the apostle considered it as comprehending men of all characters: so that, while the resurrection of the just was a great support to his mind under suffering and a most powerful motive to integrity; that of the unjust was a restraint upon wicked passions and a terror to evil doers; such as they represented him to be.

This part of his defence, while it served, with the other pleas advanced by the apostle, to show his agreement with his accusers, in points of the greatest moment, and to exculpate himself from the charge of heresy, intimated to them the fearful expectation of judgment, which was before them, if they opposed the word and unjustly inflicted evil on the righteous. The apostle points to the effect, which the serious consideration of the resurrection of the dead ought to have on every mind, and then alledges the influence it had on his own.

“And herein,” or on *this account* as the phrase may be properly rendered, “do I exercise myself to have a conscience void of offence towards God and toward man.” The apostle not only urges, in his vindication, the faith he embraced and the hope

\* Wolzogenius, in loc.

he entertained, but his life and conduct\*. His faith was divine: his hope was heavenly, his manners were pure and unblameable. In the former instances there was an agreement between his accusers and himself; and in this they could not convict him of sin. So confident was he in the purity of his character, he challenges his enemies to produce the facts, if they had any to urge against him, or had found any evil thing done by him. That man very imperfectly discharges his duty, who doth not add to the belief of the truth and the hope of heaven the practice of all good works†. It was to the honour of the apostle, that he could appeal, in this respect, to friends and foes, that his behaviour was consistent with his principles, and uniformly irreproveable. Felix, his judge, felt the force of his appeal, and deferred bringing the matter to a decision.

On these grounds did the apostle place his justification against the charge of heresy. His defence, if we consider only this part of it, was conducted

\* Postquam Paulus significavit quid crederet, quid speraret, nunc porro significat quid faceret, seu quomodo vitam suam ageret. Wolzogenius.

† Non sufficit ad officium hominis pio implendum ut vera credat et speret bona; sed oportet insuper, ut operetur bona atq; honesta.

with



with propriety and force. Though unsupported by friends, he pleads his cause with composure and courage. He openly avows his sentiments, but with a skill, which silences accusation. His plea was in itself just; but, as urged before a Roman magistrate, was particularly pertinent and valid. What heresy could there be in worshipping the same Almighty Being, whom his nation worshipped; in believing the same scriptures which they had received; in looking for that resurrection of the dead which they expected; and in being guilty of no offence either toward God or toward man? In this state of his case there was much address. Besides being adapted to disarm prejudice, it was so framed as to involve his accusers in the same charge of heresy, they alledged against him. "It was a full  
 "and satisfactory defence from the civil power,  
 "and ought to have ashamed his enemies, if piety,  
 "worth, and virtue could have expiated the offence  
 "of differing from them in opinion\*." It shows the character of Paul to great advantage. The propriety, wisdom, and temper evident in it are incompatible with the wild enthusiast. The plain, intelligible, and excellent principles contained in his confession of faith, the ingenuous courage which his vindication breathes, and the rectitude of his

\* Sermon on the Scripture Idea of Heresy, p. 11.

character are incompatible with a deceiver of the people. While we acquit the apostle from the suspicion of intending to deceive, and see in him no trace of enthusiastical delusion, we must conclude that he spake the words of *truth*; but if the words of truth, the words of GOD and OUR SALVATION. —The verdict, which declares him to be the man of sound mind and upright character, establishes also his mission from heaven.

But, when we see that neither wisdom nor innocence could secure this preacher of Christianity from base misrepresentations of his conduct, we have a specimen of those difficulties, with which Christianity, when it was first planted, had to contend. So strong is the attachment of mankind to established opinions and ancient customs, that the mind revolts at what tends to the change and subversion of them. Innovation raises resentment and arms opposition. Religion is thought too sacred to be touched by the hand of the reformer. Novelty which in many cases has charms, is offensive here; and antiquity is supposed to stamp a mark of divinity.

Christianity was considered as a new doctrine, and the preachers of it were treated as men, who brought to the ears some “strange things;” such as never had been heard from the professors of various learning in the seats of science, nor from the scribes of the Jewish synagogue. On this

this ground the Gospel was condemned as a heresy, and Paul arraigned as a pestilent man and a mover of sedition. Such false accusations were advanced against him. Persons of the highest rank and of a sacred character brought forward and supported the charges, to which ignorance and prejudice gave birth. Tertullus was employed to use against him, the arts of an insinuating and delusive oratory: and he is carried to the tribunal of a heathen magistrate, and an unjust judge; a man, in private life, abandoned to lewdness, and, in his government, a plague, by his oppressions, to all the provinces over which he presided.

Not in the present case only did Paul stand exposed to the shafts of calumny and to the sentence of a wicked tribunal. These were dangers, to which, in the course of his ministry, he was continually exposed. And all the other apostles were partakers of his sufferings.

The design of these iniquitous measures was not so much to bear down the preachers of Christianity, as to suppress the spread of the cause in which they were embarked, and to destroy it in its birth. Those holy men, who taught the way of salvation, supported the opposition of their enemies with fortitude; and the Gospel, for which they endured every evil, triumphed over falsehood  
and

and power. Its triumphs displayed the force of innocence and truth, and manifested the presence and authority of God, with those who preached it. Its success was advanced by the difficulties thrown in its way : and our faith in it is established, as we trace its progress, by the victories which we see it gaining. At the same time,

We must condemn and lament the power of prejudice, which perverts and misrepresents the best things. Christianity itself, that sublime and excellent doctrine, which contained lessons of peace and benevolence, and taught the resurrection of the dead, was branded with the name of Heresy. —Paul, the preacher of it was traduced, as a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition, among all the Jews, a ringleader of the heresy of the Nazarenes ; for so the term should be translated in the 5th as in the 14th verse. The original word is in itself a term of no criminal import ; it means no more than choice and separation. — But, in the text, it appears to be used in a bad sense : for it formed part of a charge against the apostle, and he evidently aimed to wipe off a reproach and odium conveyed under it. Even in the 5th verse, where it is rendered *sect*, it cannot well be considered as wholly indifferent ; but connects with it some sentiments of censure and contempt.

A majority,



A majority, long established and powerful, is ever inclined to be jealous of a new party or to despise it. The Christians in particular, were a sect every where spoken against ; and Paul, as associating with them, was misrepresented and abused ; though his enemies could not, when challenged to do it, prove the things whereof they accused him. —He had preached the resurrection of the dead through Jesus Christ ; he had taught justification through faith only ; he had asserted the freedom of the Gentiles from the obligations of the Mosaic law. This conduct was perverted into a ground for impeaching him of sedition and branding him with heresy.

In this great injustice was done to the apostle ; an attempt was made to impose on his judge ; a popular cry was cherished and fomented against this preacher of Christianity ; and their own minds and the minds of others were diverted from a calm and fair examination of his doctrine. An accusation served for proof, and an evil name for conviction of guilt.

We, who have the whole history of the apostle before us can easily discern the folly and mischief of such rash judgment. We, who see the evidences, the excellence and the triumphs of that religion which he preached, perceive that his accusers, led away by their hasty and passionate opinion, fought

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against

against God and rejected his counsel for their salvation. This should be a lesson of caution to us, how we judge according to appearance, and condemn without hearing.

I am thus led to apply the whole of the subject to the occasion of this day's service. The principles, on which pious zeal has raised this building, are just, important, and scriptural. But some, I doubt, will not be ready to consider them in so favourable a light; and come here, either ignorant of them or prepossessed with prejudices against them. — They, who understand and enter into their importance, may devoutly congratulate themselves on seeing this structure, which originated with them, finished and opened, and may be properly reminded to carry their religious principles into an uniform practice of devotion and virtue. To both classes of hearers the subject, will, I conceive, suggest, in these views, various useful hints.

First, I would address those, who are either ignorant of the principles on which these walls have been raised, or are not disposed to think favourably of them. You have heard, how the most excellent, even the heavenly system of truth and grace, and one of the most eminent and worthy ministers of it, not surpassed by any in his labours, sufferings, and virtues, were misjudged and calumniated; were invidi-  
ously

ously stigmatised with evil names and oppressed with violence.

In all ages of the world divine truth and its disciples have met with the like fate. They have been misrepresented, and under false colours evil entreated. As far as this has been the case of that Christianity, which we all embrace, there is not a person here, but reflects on it with strong disapprobation and grief. You think with yourselves, that had you been in those days, you would not have been partakers with such, as rashly and unjustly, oppressed the Gospel and persecuted the faithful adherents to it. You think this, having both a full conviction of the iniquity of their conduct, of the divinity of the doctrine they withstood, and of the integrity of the holy men whom they reviled and persecuted.

But, alas ! few of us, perhaps, are sensible how our minds, had we lived in those days, might have been carried away by the same popular prejudices, and have been transported into a zeal, that would have born down truth by calumny and authority — The question is not, what part would we have, *then*, acted ! But what is, *at present*, our conduct towards those who differ from us ? Do we observe reason and argument ? Do we exercise gentleness and good nature ?

Through the happy spirit of these times, the tribunal of the magistrate is not open to the charge of heresy ; nor can any, under the notion of being the ringleaders of an infamous sect, be haled to prison. But still an infamy is attached to some opinions : and with too many men hard names and ill-language are familiar expressions of dislike ; by which they pass verdict on a cause without hearing it, and excite in the breasts of others prejudices against it.

We, against whom these prejudices are raised ; we, on whom these invidious titles fall, could support *this evil*, were not by this means the progress of God's truth obstructed. We are grieved to see men, misled by the warmth of their passions, preventing themselves and one another from examining the ground of those principles, which we ingenuously avow and to the progress of which we devoutly and earnestly wish success.

The history before us admonishes you, brethren, of the weakness, the folly, nay the impiety of condemning men and opinions without a fair hearing. —It was owing to this that Paul was calumniated as an heresiarch, unjustly arraigned, and cruelly persecuted. You yourselves, when you consider this history, learn from it to reprobate the iniquity of the proceedings, which it relates. We would assure  
ourselves



ourselves, that with the instructions of this history fresh upon your minds, you will be disposed to hear our defence: and, though you may be ready to charge us, as Paul was charged, with heresy, you will suspend the sentence, till you have heard our plea.

It is our consolation and our boast, that we can take up the language; that we can adopt the sentiments of the apostle. "This we confess, that  
 "after the way, which some may call heresy, so  
 "worship we the God of our fathers; believing all  
 "things which are written in the law and the prophets: having hope towards God, that there will  
 "be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and  
 "of the unjust: and on this account we exercise  
 "ourselves to have always a conscience void of  
 "offence towards God and toward man." This is our confession of faith. To bear our testimony to this faith, to these plain, important and sacred principles, is this house erected. To renew our acknowledgment of these principles, from one week to another and to open our hearts to their divine energy it is our pious purpose to bow our knees in this place, before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Are we not, my fellow-christians, in these grand articles, partakers with you in the same faith and the same hope? We worship God: we believe in Christ; the scriptures are our rule; and

the resurrection of the dead is the object of our serious expectation.

Where we differ from you, it is upon this ground, that we are conscientiously desirous of preserving those principles in their original purity and simplicity, free from absurdities in doctrine or superstitions in practice. As you are PROTESTANTS, as you are DISSENTERS, you must own, that this desire is pious and commendable. You are convinced, as well as we, that the religion of Christ hath been corrupted.—On this account you all discard Popery, and many of you separate from the Church of England. You justly think it your duty to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus pure and undefiled.—We are happy then, that you are with us in the *main principle*: we judge that we have great and good reason to carry that principle further than you do, and to apply it to other points.

In no instance doth the application of it appear to us so important, as with respect to the worship of God and his Unity. On this head the Jewish and Christian revelations have been most plain and explicit. Our text furnishes us with clear and decisive proofs, that the object of worship through both dispensations is the same, and is *one Being*. “After the way, which they call heresy,” saith the apostle, “so worship I the God of my fathers.” He declares

clares, that he prayed to the same God after he became a Christian, that he did before : and that this was the same Being, who had been adored by the pious Jews through all ages. This Being under the Old Testament bore the name of the LORD, or JEHOVAH, and was also stiled the God of *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*. Under the New Testament he is called *the Father*, and the *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Thus Christ himself saith, that the God of the Jews was *his Father*, “ It is *my Father* that honoureth me, of whom ye say, that *he is your God*.” John viii. 54. After his resurrection he used the same language ; “ I ascend unto *my Father* and *your Father*, to *my God* and *your God*.” John xx. 17.—The apostle Peter, in like manner, asserts, that the Being, “ who glorified Jesus and raised him from the dead, was the *God of their Fathers*, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Acts iii. 13.

It carries an *aweful and commanding weight* to our minds, that the holy scriptures always speak of this Being as truly and strictly *one*. So in the first commandment ; “ I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have no other Gods before *me*.” Exod. xx. 3. So in the words of Christ to the scribe, borrowed from Moses, but thus sanctioned by him, “ The Lord our God is *one Lord* ; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” Mark xv. 29, 30.

It carries an *aweful and commanding* weight to our minds, that the blessed Jesus addrestes this Being, as the *only true God*; and that his holy apostle Paul declares, again and again, that there "*is but one God, the Father.*" This language strikes us, and appears to us totally incompatible with the notion of a plurality of persons in the godhead. To us it seems extremely erroneous, not to say, a *bold deviation* from the scriptures of truth, for any man say, that the *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God*; when the scriptures, in as plain words as possible, say that the *one God is the Father.*

It further carries to our minds an *aweful and commanding weight*, that this *one* glorious and eternal Being, the God of the Jews, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is expressly declared to be the only object of prayer. "The hour cometh and now is," saith Christ Jesus, "that the true worshippers shall worship *the Father* in spirit and in truth." John iv. 23. Mankind had bowed their knees to various idols, and had a multitude of objects of worship: but it was not to be so for the future; all prayers were to be directed to *the Father* and him only. When his disciples requested him to instruct them how to pray, he replied; "When ye pray say; *Our Father*, who art in heaven, hallowed be *thy* name, *thy* kingdom come, *thy* will be done;"



done ;" all the addresses are in the singular number, clearly expressing and defining *one person*.

It carries an *aweful and commanding* weight to our minds, that when the blessed Jesus poured out his prayers and thanksgivings, he addressed himself to *his Father only* ; " O *Father*, Lord of heaven and earth : O *my Father* ; *Father*, the hour is come " glorify thy son ; that thy son may glorify *thee* ;" and that the apostles, following his example, taught the same doctrine and prayed on the same model. " I bow my knees," saith Paul, " unto *the Father* " of our Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks always " for all things to God, even *the Father*." " Blessed " be *the God and Father* of our Lord Christ" is the language of Peter.

These are plain and full directions, to whom we ought to pray, even to the God, whom Paul, whom the Jewish church worshipped ; the *One God and Father* of all. The deep and serious sense of this matter, which these passages and many such leave on our minds is confirmed and strengthened by that discourse which the holy Jesus had with his disciples, before his last sufferings and death : when, besides renewing his commands, that they should pray to the Father, he also forbade them to pray to himself after his ascension and he was withdrawn from them. " In that day ye shall ask me nothing." John xvi. 23. To us it appears, that we could not pray to Christ without

without going against all his injunctions, especially this last prohibition. As we honour his name, and revere his authority, we cannot do it. "Our surest, safest way in our religious concerns is, we conceive, to adhere to the words and directions of scripture in every particular; by so doing we become the true worshippers, who know what we worship; and who worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship HIM\*."

In many societies of Christians, in all established churches, this cannot be done. We see it with pious concern and grief. Our conscience obliges us to withdraw from such churches; but with candour for their mistakes, while we reject their errors. Nay, our earnest desire to glorify *God, even the Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ, excites us to countenance and form such societies, where the object of worship is not multiplied; where prayers are not expressed in unscriptural terms; where a faith perplexed and confounding to reason is not blended with the devotions: but where all the addresses, whether of homage, trust, or praise, are directed to *the Father*,

\* Rogers's excellent sermon, preached in the parish church of St. Mary at Tower, Ipswich, at the archdeacon's visitation, April 23d, 1790, p. 11.

In acting thus we are persuaded, that we do honour to the *One God and Father* : that we do a thing pleasing to our divine master, who fought not his "own glory, but the glory of him that sent him." We take a step, that is necessary to the peace of our minds as we would not falsify, nor act the hypocrite in the most solemn offices of religion ; but would approve ourselves to that being, who searcheth the heart, as his humble, sincere worshippers.

Having thus ingenuously avowed and plainly stated the principles, upon which these walls have been raised into a structure to the *glory of God the Father*, we hope for, we will promise ourselves, Christians, this piece of candour, nay of justice from you, who cannot see the question in the same light in which it appears to our minds, to believe, that we act from *pious motives* ; from a reverential fear of God lest we should add to or corrupt his word ; and from a religious regard to the commands of Christ Jesus, whom we receive as our Master, whom we love as our Saviour, and before whose tribunal, as our Judge, we expect to appear. They whose views I have endeavoured to explain and defend will permit me,

Secondly, To address them with the word of exhortation, arising from the text and the occasion.—By the generosity and exertions which you have shewn in erecting this structure, you appear before  
the

the public, testifying, as did the apostle Paul, "after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of our fathers." The cause, to which you have built this house, you are sensible has been always, from the Reformation to this time, an oppressed cause. It has suffered obloquy and persecution\*. Penal laws are still in being against it†. And, even in this age of freedom, liberality, and enquiry, much odium lieth upon it. At best the honours and emoluments of the world are not with it. But under these circumstances, you, however, stand forth and avow your principles. You imitate the ingenuous, holy courage of the apostle Paul.

This is certainly to act a laudable part : on which the lovers of God and his truth must congratulate you. On which you may congratulate yourselves. Sincerity is an excellent virtue, worthy the disciples of the true and faithful witness ; worthy of those, who are persuaded, that they are possessed of the truth ; worthy of those who are animated to fidelity by the promise of a crown of life. By such open, ingenuous conduct the Christian doth honour to his own character ; and renders an essential service to the truth, which is to be diffeminated and advanced

\* Ample proofs of this occur in the instructive and interesting work of Mr. Lindsey, entitled an Historical View of the State of the Unitarian Doctrine and Worship.

† Statute 8 and 9 William III.



by being openly confessed and avowed. To conceal it, under an inconsistent profession, is hypocrisy. To suppress it, is perfidy.

In no instance is this behaviour more evil and mischievous than in what relates to the unity and worship of God. "When once that primary idea, of the Almighty Father of the Universe, is given up, there is nothing so absurd and shocking, which ignorance and folly may not adopt\*." You are aware of this; and have taken this most explicit and effectual method of guarding the idea of the divine unity, by opening a place of worship, where the devotions should strictly adhere to it; and the members of the society should be considered as avowed advocates for it. The principle which governs you, the object to which your zeal is directed, are both of the first importance and value. Rejoice, Christians, in the piety of your views, and in the sincerity of your profession. You are thus, as it were, fulfilling the words of Christ: "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship THE FATHER in spirit and in truth."

For many ages this prediction of the great change, which the Gospel would, in this respect, produce in the world, was as "a light shining in a dark place." After thousands and ten thousands had been turned from darkness to light, from idols to serve "the

\* Rogers's Visitation Sermon, p. 7.

"living

"living and true God," paganism and idolatry revived again, and flourished even in the Christian church. To Jupiter and Juno, and the deities of the heathens, succeeded, in the church of Rome, saints and angels and the Virgin Mary. To this day most protestant churches retain a plurality in their worship: and, in some services, God is invoked under the idea of having been born, of suffering and dying, and as having felt the most humiliating changes\*. But within these few years, the worship of many Christian societies hath been reformed, and been brought back nearer to the simplicity prescribed by Christ, of praying to *the Father only*. New societies, at different places, in England, Scotland, and America, have been formed upon this plan.—Think of it with devout pleasure, that you have added one to the number of such scriptural communities, truly evangelical†.

\* See the Litany.

† For the information of those, who were not present at the opening of the chapel, when this discourse was delivered, or are not acquainted with the mode of worship adopted by the congregation, it may be proper to say; "That a **LITURGY** compiled from the **BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER** *reformed*, according to the plan of the late Dr. Samuel "Clark," will be used, in conjunction with a prayer before and after sermon, formed by the officiating minister. The Liturgy is sold by J. Johnson, London; M. Haydon and Son, Plymouth; and P. F. Maurice, Plymouth Dock.

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By such exertions and efforts they will encrease, and that worship prevail in the prospect of which Christ Jesus rejoiced. It was a pleasing thought to him, that this hour was coming. Is it not also a pleasing thought to you? Yes; you do rejoice in it. The word of prophecy will be fulfilled: "In that day the Lord shall be *One*, and *his name One*." To a good mind, who honoureth the Father, this is a gladdening prospect. Admit the word of exhortation.

To carry a *conscientious principle into the whole of life*. You avow yourselves to be governed by it in your religious concerns. You are solicitous in the worship of the Almighty Maker of all things to preserve "a conscience void of offence;" discarding forms at which your judgment revolts as unscriptural, and expressing yourselves in the language of sincerity and truth. That piety which flows from *principle*, and is active in its exertions, is an important and excellent thing. The authority of the holy scriptures is, by these means, maintained; the integrity of your minds is kept uncorrupted; and an acceptable worship, because that of spirit and truth, is rendered to the Father of all. This hath a favourable aspect on the interests of Christianity at large, and tends to form and raise a complete character of religion and virtue.

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A consistent, uniform character of religion and virtue is the object, to which all our desires and endeavours should bend. The apostle expresses it by the phrase, "having a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man." The purity and simplicity of our worship, its being brought to the scriptural standard, though an important point, especially considering with what difficulty corruptions in religion are reformed, is yet but *one point* gained. It is but *one*, though a *leading*, instance of fidelity to God and his Christ. There are, besides an habitual spirit of devotion, a daily reverence of God upon our minds, all the useful and lovely train of Christian graces in domestic and social life and every personal virtue, which call for our study and pursuit. What signifieth the worship of God without obedience to him?

Here you are to meet and lift up your hearts with humble and grateful devotion to ONE GOD, the father of all; reverently owning his peerless majesty, his *supremacy* in nature, in dominion and goodness. But is this to be done *seldom only*, with intervals of frequent and unnecessary *absence*, as if the worship of God was merely an *incidental* service? Or, when this tribute of veneration hath been paid, are all thoughts of God to be dismissed and the veneration of him to be dropt, when we leave the house of prayer;



prayer : as if his authority did not continually bind us : as if his presence did not constantly encompass us ? If we here bow before him, as the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only true God : be it remembered, that he is this same glorious being, in all places and at all times ; ever to be thought of, ever to be regarded with these just and elevated sentiments.

HE should reign supreme in your *hearts*, the love of him controuling all your affections. HE should reign supreme over your *lives*, the authority of his law directing all your actions. HE should reign supreme over all your *views and pursuits*, his honour and glory being the object to which they should be all subservient. Your worship should be regular, constant, and fervent ; worthy your knowledge of of that being, who is excellent and glorious above all others. Your temper and deportment benevolent ; worthy of the being, whom you adore as the one GOD and FATHER of ALL. And your conversation pure and holy ; worthy the purer worship you profess to pay to him who hath called you to his kingdom and glory. This reminds me to hold up to your consideration,

Lastly, The glorious and animating end of your faith, of which the apostle professes his hope ; viz. " the resurrection of the dead, of the just and the " unjust." To that solemn event are your thoughts

led forward in every act of devotion and in every enquiry after truth : as the consummation of your faith and hope. The day of the resurrection is the day which will try your works ; which will display your sincerity ; which will recompence your obedience, your love of truth and your conscientious adherence to it. The apostle, supported by this hope, was, under false accusations, courageous : and, before an unjust tribunal, undaunted.

With that day in view, Christians, you are animated to fulfil the duties of a virtuous life, in its usual exercises, with vigour and constancy. With that day in view, want you any inducements, any encouragements to fortify your minds in the profession of unpopular truth, to reconcile you to unmerited reproach, and to excite you to perseverance in your sincere and disinterested endeavours to bring men to the knowledge and worship of the ONE GOD and FATHER of all ?

The prospect of that day carries with it every consideration, every encouragement to godly simplicity and sincerity, to the profession of the truth whatever it may cost us, and to the maintaining of “ a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man.” That day will wipe off every injury and insult. That day will vindicate our characters. — That day will bring in everlasting righteousness and truth. That day will reveal Christ Jesus coming  
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in the clouds of heaven to punish with awful indignation those who have "held the truth in unrighteousness;" either wilfully corrupting it, or disingenuously concealing it, or by wicked lives disgracing it: but coming with power and grace, to applaud and reward the faithful advocates of truth and piety. That day will be to all who have borne their testimony to Christ and his truth, a day of honour, joy and triumph.

To that illustrious, glorious morning direct, Christians, your constant views. To the felicities and honours of it let your ardent expectations rise.—Strengthened by this belief, rejoicing in this hope, "fight the good fight of faith and lay hold of eternal life."

*F I N I S.*